Ministry of Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

Log Number: 08-18-79
Week of April 28, 2008

ALPACA HANDLERS SEEK SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN SHEARING AND SORTING

The City of Humboldt will become a flurry of fleece in early May as 24 alpaca handlers learn to shear and sort their animals.

The Alpaca Shearing and Sorting School will be held May 3 and 4, organized by the Saskatchewan Alpaca Breeders Network (SABN).

Participants will be taught how to shear alpacas and sort the fleece in ways that maximize the harvest and minimize stress on the animals and handlers.

The school blends theory with application, as classroom sessions are followed by step-by-step demonstrations.

The clinic is a response to the shortage of contract shearers and sorters in the alpaca industry. "It's getting harder and harder to get the contract shearers to come around, because they're so busy," said Lorraine Bray of the SABN. "The more people who learn to do it for themselves on their own farms – even if they're not doing it to set up a business where they go out to do everybody else's – it really helps out."

Clinicians Trudy McCall and Cathy Merkley from Lloydminster are widely regarded as experts in the alpaca community. Merkley is a contract sorter. She is a qualified international fleece and halter judge for both Huacaya and Suri types of alpacas.

McCall offers contract shearing services around Saskatchewan. She holds a degree in biology, and has obtained an Animal Health Technician Certificate.

Because of the quality of instruction and the reputation of the clinicians, the Shearing and Sorting School attracts interest from across Western Canada. Participants come from British Columbia to Manitoba.

The two-day clinic begins with all participants learning the basics of shearing an alpaca. Following this session, the students divide into either shearing or sorting groups. The shearers practice their techniques on three or four animals each. The sorters then take the fleece away from the tables to practice sorting.

(more)

An important focus of the clinic is to minimize the stress on the animals and the handlers. "It can be an anxious experience for the alpaca," said Bray. "It's not a natural occurrence for them, but by having trained people to get them on and off the shearing table safely, and by making sure they're safe when they're on the shearing table, it can reduce their anxiety quite a bit."

Effective shearing balances speed and calmness. Bray notes that there is a certain technique to the order of shearing, so as to limit the amount of time it takes.

The demeanor of the handler also affects the alpaca's temperament during the process. "The idea is not to get too stressed about going fast, while at the same time, you don't want to have the animals on the table for any longer than you need to," said Bray.

The $250 fee to participate in the Shearing and Sorting School includes meals and instructional materials. Participants will also have the opportunity to purchase electric shearers. Shearing and sorting tables will be available for use throughout the clinic.

Those interested in participating should contact Lorraine Bray at (306) 934-1682 or Jane Wortman at (306) 374-2636.

- 30 -

For more information, contact:

Lorraine Bray, Treasurer
Saskatchewan Alpaca Breeders Network
Phone: (306) 934-1682
E-mail : bray@sasktel.net
Website: http ://www.sabn.net/